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Review of QBic Computer

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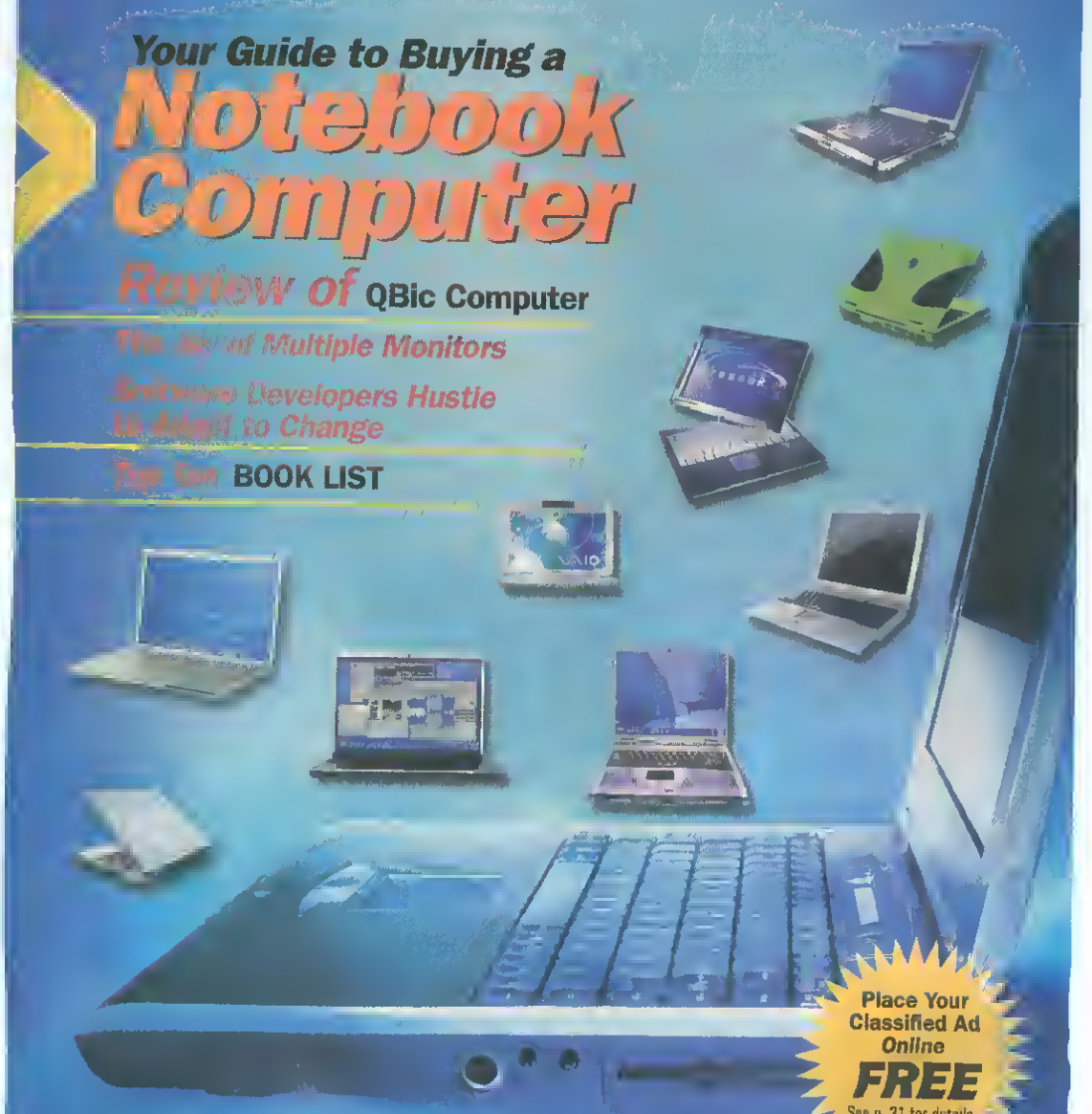
Top Ten BOOK LIST



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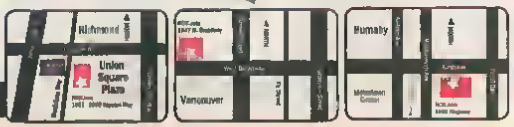

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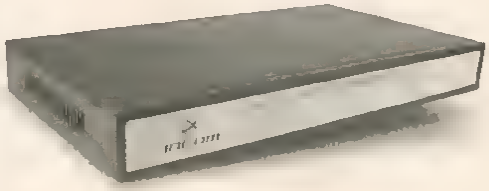

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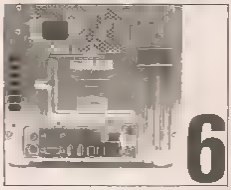

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Times are changing

By Geof Wheelwright

So just where is innovation in the technology sector being created – and how does that benefit us, the people supposed to use the technology? That's been the question much on my mind over the last few weeks as I have visited with some of the companies that you might reasonably expect to be innovators and leaders in the sector.

I first visited with a company called Novell at its annual Brainshare conference in Salt Lake City. The real innovation at that conference was all taking place around the Linux operating system – and its inventor Linus Torvalds was there to whip up the crowd of more than 6,000 enthusiastic developers, network administrators and Novell fans. Novell, you may recall, made a name for itself as the company that pioneered network operating systems and created Novell NetWare in the process. These days, however, Novell innovates by championing Linux and the "open source" development idea.

The idea of open source is a positive innovation for the technology industry and one that has really been a little misunderstood. In many cases, it has been characterized as simply free software – and yet it's a lot more than that. Open source means that developers have access to the source code, for example, of the Linux operating system – meaning that they can "add value" to it by customizing it and sharing their work in others.

In the Linux world, you make a living by selling implementation services, consulting and training – as well as specializewd applications – "up the stack" from the operating system level. One key impact of this philosophy is that it provides a way to eliminate the "monopoly tax" that detractors say is imposed by Microsoft and Intel in the pricing of its respective Windows software and Pentium processor products. Linux can be obtained for free and runs on a variety of processors – including some that are not made by Intel.

My innovation journey took me next to Microsoft – and, in particular, Microsoft Research. It spends a small portion of Microsoft's annual $6.8 billion research and development budget at facilities in Redmond, Washington, California, the United Kingdom and China. And the company works in 55 different research projects in those facilities, including speech recognition, wireless networking, imaging, human/machine interfaces and database management.

And some of those projects are very cool – from using wireless networking to help you find exactly where you are at any moment in time to using digital pictures to create a visual timeline of your life. Innovation at Microsoft Research, however, is all about getting research published, presenting it at academic conferences and having it incorporated in Microsoft products.

If you've ever used Microsoft Reader for reading an eBook, you will have seen Microsoft Research's ClearType technology. If you have used the speech recognition in Microsoft Office, that too came from Microsoft Research.

But at Dell Corporation, which was the last stop on my innovation journey, innovation lies in the way it sells and distributes – not necessarily in its products. While Dell produces good PCs, printers, PDAs and a quite acceptable MP3 player, its real innovation has been in its direct model for selling and distributing its products. And that's why it has grown to enjoy revenues of more than $40 billion annually – and build a cash war chest of something like $8 billion (and growing ever quarter).

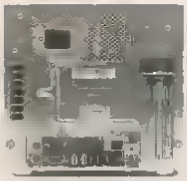
So at Dell, innovation is about reducing costs, improving profitability, delivering direct to customers (without the cost of a "middle man") and having a "zero inventory" manufacturing process.

And having been on several Dell factory tours, I have to admit that the manufacturing process is pretty innovative – trucks with parts drive up to one side of the factory and completed computers come out the other end and get loaded onto the trucks that will deliver them to customers. And every computer that Dell makes it already sold (and usually) already paid for. This gives Dell a HUGE advantage over anyone else making PCs. It's also good for anyone who buys a Dell PC in that the company can offer lower-priced PCs and they can make them to order.

So that's three different views of innovation in the tech sector. Feel free to email us with your views on what technology innovation means to you.

QBic

By Douglas Alder



Computer:	QBic
Manufacturer:	Soltek
Price as configured:	$759
Configuration	512 MBs RAM, (the system shows as only 480 MBs as the video chip takes 32 MBs for itself) 40GB Seagate 7200, Athlon 2500 (1.67Ghz) Mobile Chipset, LG DVD/CD-RW Combo Drive, backpack.

The QBic is a bare-bones, small-profile PC, manufactured by Soltek, a Taiwanese computer manufacturer. The unit is small enough to lug around, in fact it comes with a backpack carrying case in the box.

The unit I received for review shipped with 480 MBs of RAM, an Athlon 1.87 GHz processor with 64 Kbytes of Level 1 Cache, 512 Kbytes of Level 2 Cache. There was a 40 GB Seagate 7200 drive, as well as a DVD/CD-RW drive installed. Software installed on the hard drive was just the basic Windows XP install and a few manufacturer utilities. There is no floppy drive in the default configuration, though there is room for one should it be required. There is also an option to add a parallel port on the motherboard. The unit has two DDR DIMM 184 pin slots. The system can handle AMD Athlon, Athlon XP and Duron processors, with up to 333 MHz system bus.

On the front of the unit is a push-and-pop panel door that hides two USB 2 ports and a Firewire port. There are also headphone, microphone and SPDIF (Sony/Philips Digital Interface) connectors on the front to allow the transfer of digital audio without the loss of quality that occurs when converting from an analog format. Another push-and-pop panel cover hides where a floppy drive could go.

The back of the unit has three thumb-screws that do not require a screw driver to open. Adding a hard drive, or RAM is fairly straightforward for the do-it-yourself crowd, though the inside of the case is fairly cramped, as with most of these smaller units. There is room for a single PCI card and an AGP slot. The unit has a 250-Watt power supply, which should be plenty of power for the upgrades possible for this compact computer. The back panel also includes two more USB 2.0 ports and two Firewire ports on the back of the computer.

The video system is a North Bridge nVIDIA nFORCE1 IGP, for Integrated Graphics Processor. Translation, there is no video card, the graphics chip is built right on the motherboard. The good part of this equation is that the nVIDIA chip supports two monitors for people who like extra screen real estate. The system also has an S-Video TV out port to display your Windows screen on a television set.

Another bonus for this multi-media friendly system is 6-channel audio support. The back panel has three sound connectors to plug a set of six speakers into. There is software support to configure this sound system through the nVIDIA nForce Control Panel.

The cooling system on this unit is quite elaborate. In addition to the standard heat sink on top of the CPU with a small fan mounted on top. There is a larger fan that is designed to pull the hot air from the top of the CPU fan out of the case. Finally, the sides, back and bottom of the computer case are all perforated to improve airflow. All these features are required in order to house the increasingly high speed, and correspondingly heat intensive, processors in such a small case. Despite what it says on the side of the box, this is not a particularly quiet computer. It makes as much noise as all my other computer equipment put together. There is a quiet mode setting in the BIOS, but it doesn't quiet it down that much.

Who should buy this unit? The QBic computer is small enough to be in the running for gamers who like to travel for LAN parties. The unit can be over-clocked and there is an AGP slot for a better video card. The unit reviewed even came with its own matching backpack to load the computer into. Another target group might be home video editors who want a unit with three Firewire ports, SPDIF audio, dual monitor capability built-in and S-Video out capability. Configuring the unit for video would suggest packing in large, fast hard drives. Finally, the unit is small and attractive enough to sit in a media room for video playback, although the fan is a little noisy in it's default setting and may be distracting.

Douglas Alder was the founding editor and publisher of the now-defunct publication The Computer Paper. He currently does FileMaker consulting and database development as HomeBase Internet. www.hbase.net

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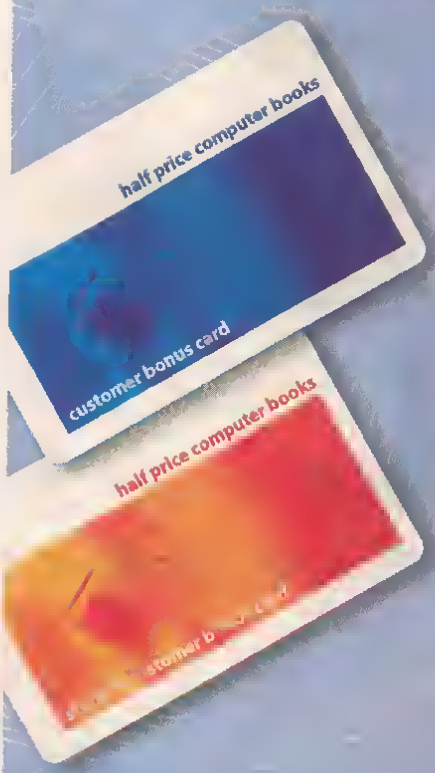

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By John Okill

The Joy of Multiple Monitors

Do you find that you are constantly Alt+Tab-ing through your applications? Do you have a decent-sized monitor but find yourself wanting more display real estate? Maybe what you need is a multi-monitor setup for your system! I was first introduced to this concept in the workplace, and was soon spoiled for anything less, and found out what was needed to replicate this setup at home.

The benefits of having multiple monitors should be obvious – more screens means you can see more of your applications actively running at once. In the setup I am using as I write this, I have a 17" Samsung flat panel display running of an ATI Radeon card, and a separate old Sylvania 17" CRT adjacent to it running off a generic PCI-based video card. Both are set to the same resolution and I can move my mouse seamlessly between the two monitors to access various applications. As I write this article on my "main" screen I surf the Web on the other one for research, all the while keeping tabs on my CD-ripping program which is chugging away in the background. Other times I have used this arrangement to compare twin documents at a glance, write Web code on one screen while uploading it to another, and even do some word processing on one screen while watching a movie on the other. It's not hard to come up with your own uses for such a handy monitor arrangement.

A few years ago having more than one monitor might have seemed a real extravagance for most people. But as monitor prices continue to drop, and the technology readily available, the only real limitation to expanding your virtual desktop is the size of your physical desktop and the dimension of your monitors.

What You Need

Starting with Windows 98 Microsoft built multi-monitor support directly into this and all of their subsequent operating systems. With this underlying OS support, all that you now need is either a single video card containing multiple monitor ports, or two separate video cards for your computer.

There are a number of companies that sell video cards containing multiple video ports, including ATI, nVidia and others. In this case setup is pretty straightforward, as the underlying driver software supplied by these manufacturers makes things straightforward. The only thing to be aware of is that many video card with multiple monitor outputs supply one analog and one digital DV-I connector, so make sure that your monitor connections support these formats, or check the box to see if adaptors for other formats are included. It's a rude surprise to buy a dual monitor video card and then discover you don't have the right connector for one of your two monitors.

The other option is to use two (or more) video cards. If you have a motherboard that has a built-in video connection, you can add another card to the open AGP (Accelerated Graphics Port) slot that is standard on all current motherboards. (Note that this is not always a sure-fire thing, as not all motherboard with built-in video are capable of driving

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two displays simultaneously – look up the specs on your motherboard on the manufacturer's Web site first). If you already have a video card in your computer – most likely in your one-and-only AGP slot – you can obtain an older PCI-based video card to act as your second connection. Images that cannot be processed directly by your secondary video card are offloaded to your computer's CPU, which can slow things down overall performance considerably, so the more memory and processing power you can get in your secondary card, the better.

As for the second monitor, prices are getting cheaper and cheaper, especially for CRT models, as they are slowly being replaced by LCD screens in the marketplace. Better yet, look for a used monitor, which will be cheaper and ought to last you until LCDs become ubiquitous. As always when buying a monitor, try not buy purely on size alone, but also consider dot pitch (the smaller the better) and the refresh rate of the monitor, which ought to be 75 hertz or higher to eliminate noticeable flicker.

Once you have obtained the necessary hardware, set up your monitors, plugged in your video card(s), and have generally booked everything together, fire up your computer. Now the fun begins!

Software Setup

You can expect at least one of your monitors to remain blank at first. That's because your computer hasn't been told to use the second monitor attached to it as yet.

To change your monitor setup, from the Start menu click Control Panel, and then choose Display. Click on the settings tab and you should see a couple of blue squares with numbers inside them. Click on the unselected square and then click "Extend my Windows desktop onto this monitor". Click Apply and the second monitor should flicker to life. Now you can adjust such things as screen resolution, colour quality and the refresh rate of your new screen. Ideally, you will want to set both monitors to the same resolution, if only so that your mouse doesn't seemingly "disappear" when you move it outside the display range of one monitor to the other. If you are still not sure which monitor is controlled by which video card, click the Identify button and a big number should appear on each screen, identifying which it is. If you get through this and you are still only getting a display on one screen (or worse, none at all), take out the PCI video card and try moving it to another available slot.

Windows ought to recognize the two screens as contiguous, so that you can smoothly glide your mouse back and forth between the two screens, popping out of the right side of one and immediately appearing on the other. If you do not have this arrangement, you need to change the order in which your screens appear in the Display Properties dialog. All you have to do is click and hold on one of the two blue boxes, and then move it over to the other side of the initial blue square. Click Apply and the two screens will switch, and should now allow you to glide your mouse effortlessly between them. You should now be set up for multiple-monitor fun!

Some Things to Keep in Mind

Having multiple monitors does take a little bit of getting used to. For example, you may find yourself looking for a search dialog for your active program, only to find that it is being displayed on the other screen, perhaps under one (or two) other windowed applications. Also keep in mind that you should drive graphics- and memory-intensive applications like games and video playback to the monitor driven by the most powerful video card on your system (assuming you are using two separate display devices instead of a single card with dual video outputs). And no matter how you slice it, even if you are using flat screen displays, you will discover you have a lot less physical space on your desk.

While this articles looks at only a dual monitor setup, all of the information here applies to three or more monitors. In fact, it is possible under Windows 98 and higher to connect and work with up to nine monitors from one computer, though any more than three is rare, if only from the perspective of having enough space on your physical desktop for so many monitors, as well as the number of available display slots on your computer's motherboard.

It's safe to say that once you switched on to using multiple monitors, you will never look back. You will wonder how you ever coped with just a single monitor.

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Software developers hustle to adapt to change

by Trevor Greene

VANCOUVER – Computer software has become both a household name and a critical business commodity, especially within the last 10 years As a result, software developers have been hustling to keep up with constant, rapid change in their professional lives Just ask the folks trying to fend off the MyDoom virus

Along with the rapid adaptation and innovation of software technologies, the methods and tools used to design and put together the latest software products have also adapted Long-gone are the days when one generation of technology would do for years on end

"Technology based solutions for the business world are becoming more and more important and critical every year," says Rex Arnold, president of The Vancouver NET User Group (vandotnet com) "Every serious business needs infrastructure that involves technology in one way or the other, not to mention just to stay competitive "

As the systems and equipment have changed, so have the tools used to create the next generation of software Two industry giants, Microsoft and Sun Microsystems, have built the leading developer tools for enterprise-style development, which have set the standards for how development is done now and in the future

To meet the needs of changing enterprise-style development, they have seen total makeovers – essentially complete rewrites – of their APIs, frameworks, platforms and languages, says Arnold

"Enterprise scale development is now imperviously object oriented, highly componentized, highly distributed, more seamlessly interoperable, loosely coupled, and all with a growing uninterrupted connectivity," he says.

Microsoft, whose research bill in enterprise scale development is well into the billions, has developed a system called NET while Sun has created J2EE Both systems are interoperable with each having subtle advantages and disadvantages, and have come into widespread industry use

To meet the gap between quickly evolving development systems and current skill sets, yet another new generation of developers is evolving, but they remain few on the ground and much in demand

Arnold says developers must understand not only the programming aspect but also the concepts of component based messaging, concurrency, availability, scalability, resource contention, remote access, security and a thorough understanding of deployment and versioning issues

One school that has tailored a course to meet the needs of developers keeping pace with software leaps and bounds is Langara College

Langara's Solutions Developer course is designed to get people who are interested in Enterprise level development up and using the technologies and tools that are currently being used by the industry's leading software firms

The course teaches students how to build real world business applications with a focus on the real world business problems that these tools are designed to address.

The instructors teach students to build applications that are scalable, robust, provide concurrency support through synchronized access, transactional, and always available and reliable On top of this, the applications taught are easy to deploy and re-version

Students also learn how to maintain and tune the systems by testing them, adding instrumentation, performing stress-based analysis, incorporating performance counting and tracing, debugging and profiling

LANGARA COLLEGE CONTACT: Jennifer Reid, Program Co-ordinator, Computer Technology, Continuing Studies 604-323-5266 jreid@langara bc ca

Trevor Greene is a Vancouver-based writer

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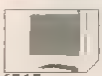

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Your guide to buying a notebook computer

By Geof Wheelwright

A notebook computer may be the most useful purchase that you, as a computing enthusiast or professional, can possibly make. It can also be a dreadful and expensive mistake

It works like this Modern notebook computers are now as powerful as almost any desktop computer you care to name You can get them with the same processing power, computer graphics, sound capabilities, quality of display and even goodies such as DVD-ROM drives, built-in cameras for video conferencing and huge hard disks Typically, however, you pay anywhere from an extra 33 to 100 per cent for a notebook when compared to a similarly-specified desktop computer

So, from the outset, your decision about whether or not you need a notebook computer should be based on what you are planning to use it for – and how much you have to spend As long as you accept that you WILL be paying a premium for portability, then you are ready to deal with this issue in a realistic fashion

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Your decision will also be based on whether you already have a desktop computer or not. If you plan to use the notebook as your "second computer", you are likely to be thinking about this choice in a very different fashion that if

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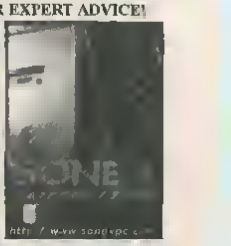

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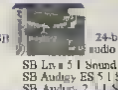

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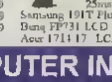

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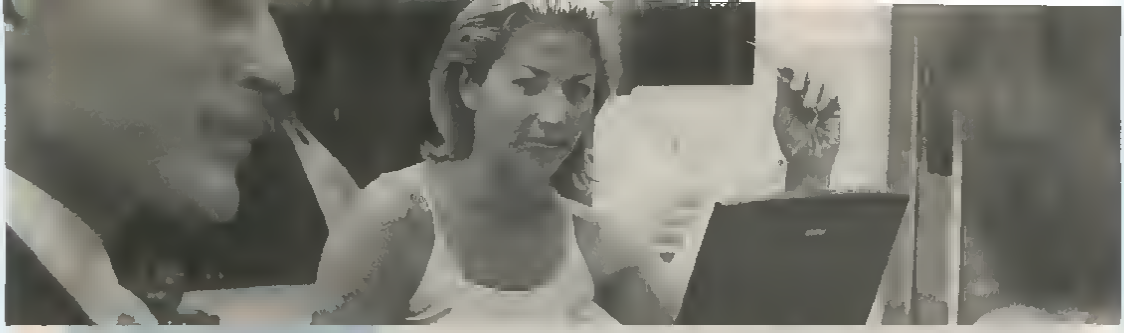
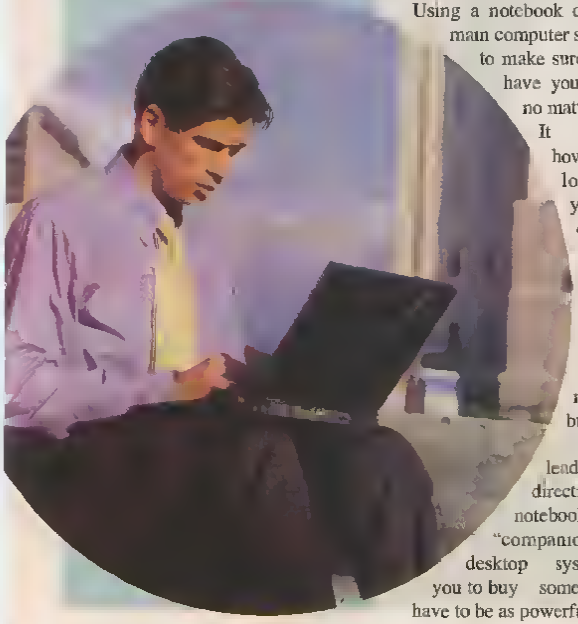


So what is Centrino?

So what is Centrino – other than another designer technology name on a landscape littered with them? Intel's answer to that question is simply that Centrino represents Intel's best technology for mobile PCs. It combines the Intel Pentium M processor, the Intel 855 Chipset Family and the Intel PRO/Wireless 2100 Network Connection – which were all optimized, validated and tested to work together with mobility in mind.

Looking at processor performance, Intel says that using MobileMark 2002 (an benchmark testing a combination of battery life and performance), Intel Centrino mobile technology-based systems can deliver up to five hours of battery life or more, compared to about four hours on mobile Intel Pentium III processor-M based system and about 3 hours on mobile Intel



the notebook is to be the only computer in your home office.

We'll start with the assumption that you do not already have a computer and that you are thinking about using the notebook computer as your main system.

This immediately has several impacts. The first is that you will likely want a notebook with built-in wireless networking – otherwise you will have to be chained to a desk to be connected to your network or the Internet. You will probably want a notebook that uses Intel's Centrino wireless networking chip set. [See box copy of Intel's Centrino wireless networking technology for more on this.]

The next issue you'll face is something of a double-edged sword. Using a notebook computer as your main computer system allows you to make sure that you always have your data with you, no matter where you are. It also means, however, that if you lose or damage your notebook computer – and have not properly backed up all on the data on it – then you will potentially lose all the data you need to run your business.

All of this may lead you in the direction of using your notebook computer as a "companion" to your desktop system. This allows you to buy something that doesn't have to be as powerful as your desktop system, won't necessarily be used to hold all your data and can generally just be dedicated to those jobs that you need to take care of while you are out of the office.

The real question in selecting an appropriate portable, however, does not lie solely in whether you use it as a replacement for a desktop or as a "companion" PC. Instead, there are a whole range of technological and design issues to be considered - each of which could significantly impact on just how well the portable does the job you want it to do.

Display

While the question of display quality is often a matter of personal preference on desktop computers, it is a vital issue where portable computers are concerned. It doesn't matter how fast your system is - or how much capacity it offers - if you can't see what you are doing.

Older portables will tend to have LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) screens that are somewhat muddy and hard-to-read, while most modern notebook systems offer crisp, clear color displays using active matrix color LCDs that are often easier to read than their desktop counterparts.

Passive matrix color LCD technology is the cheapest LCD color technology available and was initially popular for use on the highest-volume color computers. It offered quite serviceable color - yet without the crisp and bright appearance you are probably used-to on desktop systems. Most systems you'll buy today, however, offer active matrix displays.

Active matrix LCD color is what every portable user is after - but until a couple of years ago, few could afford

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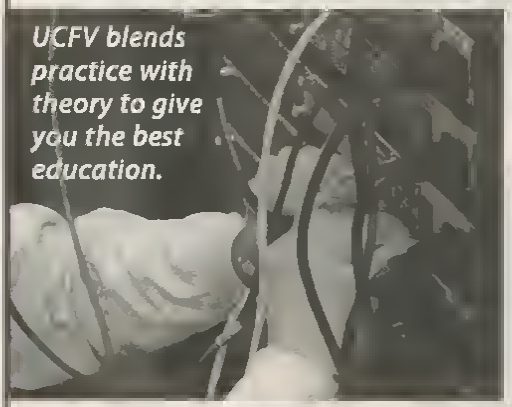

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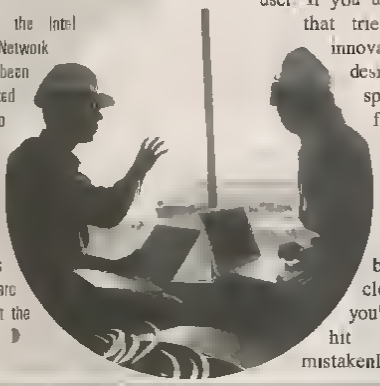
Pentium 4 processor M based systems On the same benchmark, Intel says that Centrino mobile technology offers 41 percent faster performance on multitasking office productivity applications compared to a mobile Intel Pentium III processor M 1.2 GHz and a 15 percent improvement compared to the mobile Intel Pentium 4 processor-M 2.4 GHz system

Meanwhile the Intel 855 chipset family includes two new chipsets developed exclusively for the mobile market segment the 855PM supporting discrete graphics and 855GM with integrated Intel Extreme Graphics 2 technology

Intel says that the Intel PRO/Wireless 2100 Network Connection has been designed and validated to connect easily to 802.11b WiFi certified access points It also supports advanced wireless LAN security including 802.1x WEP and VPN technologies and will be software upgradeable to support the latest WPA technology



It most cases, it produces a display that equals or exceeds the quality of that used on desktop systems When implemented on a powerful machine, it really does go a very long way to realizing the dream of a desktop system that just happens to be contained within a laptop computer

Keyboard

Second to the screen, the keyboard is the most immediate fact of life to consider for any notebook computer user. If you use a keyboard that tries to use an innovative keyboard design to minimize space, you may find that you'll be unable to find your keys when your want them. If the keys are bunched too close together, you'll be unable to hit one without mistakenly hitting another at the same time

Similarly, if the keys on the keyboard are too small - you won't be able to accurately hit them at all. The responsiveness of the keyboard is also important If you are using your notebook computer while travelling, you may not hit the keys with the same force and intensity that you would use if you were sitting at a desk

On additional keyboard consideration is the sound of the keys when they are being used. For those who plan to use their notebook computers to actually take notes during meetings and presentations, other attendees may not take kindly tho the 'clack-clack" noise of your keyboard. Notebook systems with "silent" keyboards would be your best bet here. Trial and error is the only way to find the quietest keyboard

Battery life and type

This is probably the biggest complaint of most notebook computer users. my battery never lasts long

Continue on page 26

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Chapter Five – Business Model of the Month

by Geof Wheelwright

By the end of July 1999, the big question in my mind was how our company was going to make any money. At the time, there were lots of people telling me that it didn't really matter – no-one was expecting us to make a profit for a long time. In fact, our job was not to make money – but rather to raise pots of it and spend it fast and hard in a way that would convince people we were serious about making an impact on the market.

But what market? And what was the point of it all? What were we trying to achieve (other than getting ourselves rich)? I started by thinking about Investment.com as a publishing enterprise – partially because publishing was my background and partially because treating Investment.com as a publication was the fastest route to bringing in some revenue (although, again, I was told that this was not something we should really be worrying about).

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The idea was that we could start by running the Investment.com Web site as a content-only site designed to attract readers and advertisers, get a revenue stream started through advertising – and then build on that by developing transaction-based revenue by offering users financial products and services that they could buy through the Web site.

We even had a deal in place (one which predated my arrival at the company) with an organization called Citizens' Bank – which was an early Canadian "virtual" bank established in the late 1990s. The idea was that we would refer mortgage and credit card clients to Citizens Bank and get a "finder's fee" for each customer we sent to them who successfully qualified for a loan or credit card.

It was clear in the early going, however, that most of Canada's major financial institutions would have nothing to do with us. They were all busy setting up their own online offerings – and had no need of working with an upstart, dot com public company through which to funnel their financial services businesses.

So we decided we would just have to get there the old way: one customer at a time. If we could get enough people regularly visiting our Web site to read the latest financial news, check on their stocks, track their portfolios and so on, then maybe they would be attracted by the idea of having us engage them with appropriate vendors of financial services. And we figured that if we were to tell banks, brokerage houses, credit card companies and mutual fund companies that we were willing to send them customers (for a nominal fee), why would they say no?

I started the process of creating a publishing vehicle by pushing on two fronts. First of all, I really had to understand how we could substantiate our distribution model to our advertisers – explaining who was coming to our Web site and why they would want to advertise to this audience. I also needed to satisfy myself that the advertising money was even worth pursuing as everyone – even then – agreed that advertising rates based on "page impressions" (ie. how many times you're a given Web page was loaded on individual users' screens) was not likely to last long – and that advertisers would soon want to buy based on "click-through" rates (ie. how many users actually clicked on an ad and visited the advertisers' Web site) or merely paying a fee only

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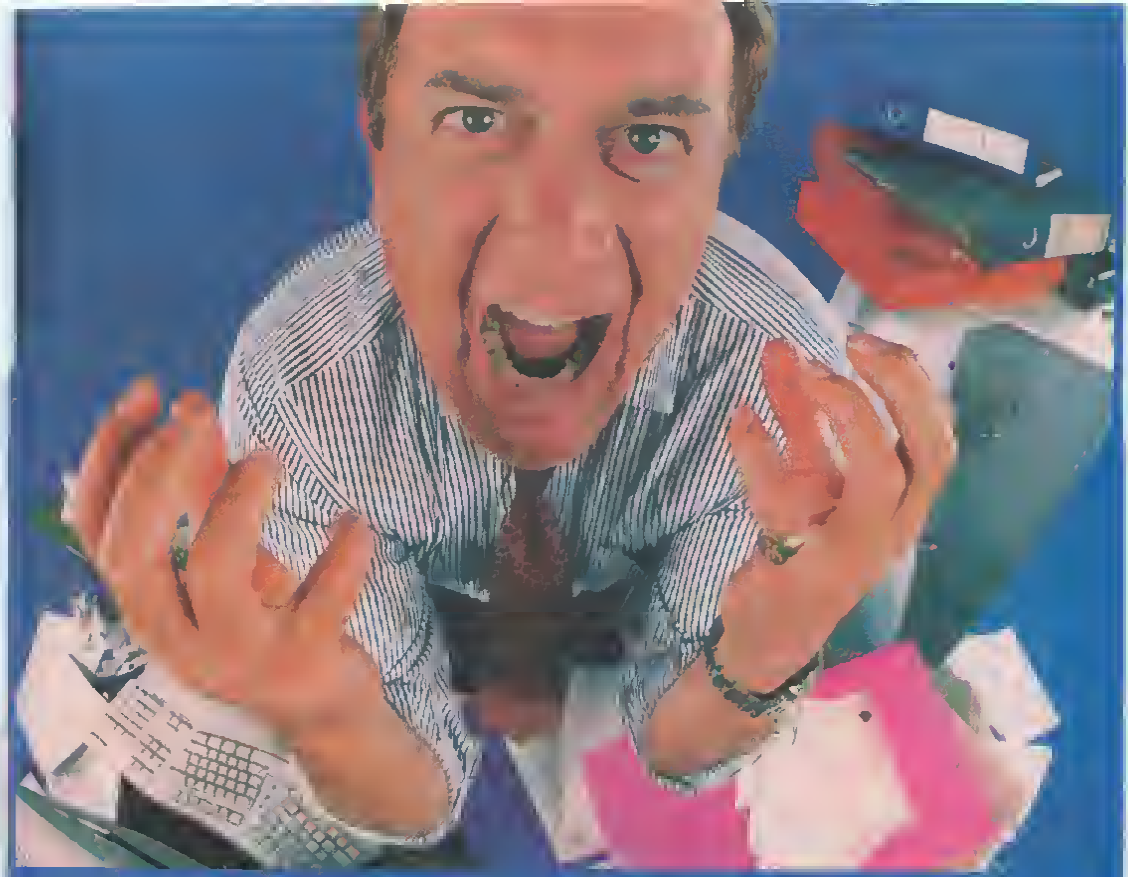

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Radeon 9200SE 128MB oem (Sapphire)	$70
Radeon 9600SE /9600 128MB (Sapphire)	$118/149
ATI Radeon 9800Pro 128MB(box)	$319
ATI Rad on 9800XT 256MB(Retail box)	$629
Gainward Geforce Fx5200DT TVO/DVI 128MB	$85
Gainward Geforce Fx5600XT 128 /Fx5600XTX 256mb	$135/169
Gainward Geforce Fx5700DT 128MB /Fx5700ultra 128mb	$199/259
Gainward GF Fx9900XT /FX5950 GoldenSample 256mb	$279/619
TV Tuner & Video Card PCI Sienic USB FM	$59/$118

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Logitech Quickcam Web	$69
BenQ Dc2300 4x Digital Zoom	$149
BenQ Dc2410 3.1M Pixel CCD	$199
BenQ Dc5330 3.2M Pixel 4x	$329
Canon A300/A60/A70	$269/$309/$419
Canon S400 4.0 megapixel	$599
Canon S50 5.0 megapixel	$699
Canon G5 5.0megapixel	$919
Canon ZR60/ZR70 miniDV	$585/$795
Canon Elura 50 miniDV	$849
Canon Optura 10/20 mileDV	$779/$865
Canon EOS REBEL kit	$1399
Casio EXS3 3 megapixel	$469
Casio QVR-4 4 megapixel	$569
Samsung DM20I/240/360	$158/$199/$319
Samsung Dm420/DM-V4 4.1megapixel	$389/$479
Samsung SCD71/SCD87 MiniDV	$589/$859
Samsung 50" PPM50H2 Plasma Screen	$8429
Samsung 42" PPM42S3 Plasma Screen	$4699
BenQ 40"W1 46"Plasma Screen	$4699
BenQ 4300U 48bit 600x1200dpi Scanner	$65
BenQ 5000U 48bit 1200x2400dpi Scanner	$85
BenQ 5300U 48bit 1200x2400dpi Scanner	$95

Monitor -CRT/Pure Flat

AOC PF700 17" 1280X1024/75mm	$149
AOC 9GLR 19" 1600X1200	$239
Samsung 753DF 17" 1280x1024	$179

Monitor -LCD

ACER AL1511BM 15" niter S2ms robotic	$425
ACER AL1711BM 17" niter 8ms PC2 robotic	$535
SONY SDM-S73H 15" LCD	$633
SONY SDM-S93 19" LCD	$899
VIEWSONIC VG700 / VG900	$649/$859
NEC 171V 17" LCD	$675
NEC 1860NX 18" 1960NX LCD	$699/899
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Samsung 173S/193S LCD	$559/799
Philips 150S4SB 15" inch PC LCD	$428
LG 7871F 17 inch LCD PANEL	$539
LG 1515S 15 inch LCD PANEL	$419

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Samsung/LG Lite-On 16X DVD	$39
LG/Lite-On 52x32x52x CD-RW	$45
Plextor PX-708A 8x CD DVD +R/RW	$225
NEC ND2500A 4x DVD R/RW IDE	$125
LG 4081B 8X DVD+/-RW Drive IDE Int	$125
LG 4082B 8X DVD+/-RW IDE Int (black)	$148
Pioneer 107(OEM) 8x DVD+/-R	$155
Lite-On 811S 8X DVD+ R/RW	$138

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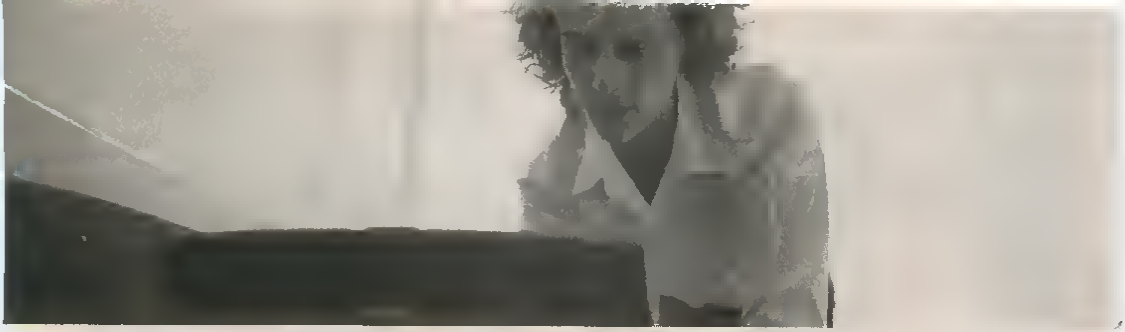
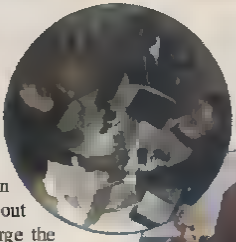


Your guide to buying a notebook computer

Continued from page 20



enough Just as your plane takes off for a 12-hour trip halfway round the world, you flip open your laptop computer only to learn that the battery has just about run out of juice. With no way to recharge the machine while en route, you thrust it under the seat and madly begin scribbling the notes that you should have been typing (unless you are on one of the planes that a number of airlines have started refitting with power plugs for notebook computers).

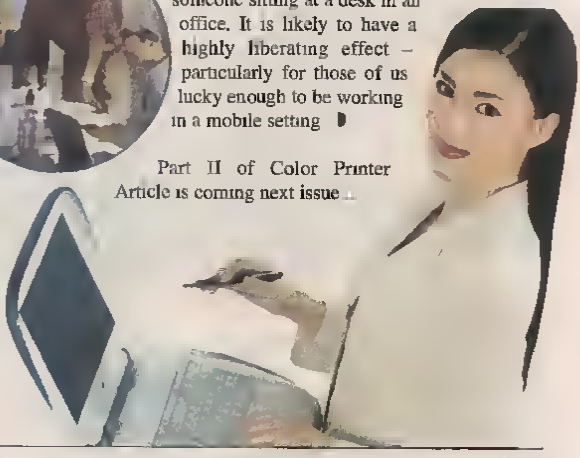
If this sounds familiar, you are one of the thousands of portable computer users glad to see the current trend toward removable, rechargable battery designs that allow you to easily carry charged-up spare batteries. Dell's Axim line of Pocket PC-based handheld systems, for example, are a good example of this breed of handheld

The future

While we will no doubt see more portables bundled with new goodies (such as DVD –R drives, which allow you to create your own DVDs), systems with longer battery life (and more flexible ways to replace batteries) and improvements in screen and keyboard technology, all these trends are more than the sum of their parts

They pave the way to a future where anyone can do any kind of computing anywhere at anytime and still be as useful (and often more useful) than someone sitting at a desk in an office. It is likely to have a highly liberating effect – particularly for those of us lucky enough to be working in a mobile setting ◗

Part II of Color Printer Article is coming next issue



Business Model of the Month

Continued from page 22

when and if a consumer actually bought something from the advertisers' Web site

This was made somewhat easier by the fact that our development partner in the Investment com Web site – Stockhouse com – was enjoying a huge surge in Web site traffic and growth for its Web site (devoted to coverage of public companies in the US, Canada, the Far East and Europe) I was able to tap into the experience on staff at Stockhouse com to get some sense of what we could expect

The early indications were that we were not going to make much money from advertising – and that it was really not worth setting up a dedicated ad sales team for it. So instead I shifted my attention to the prospect of getting a deal with a well-known Web site ad sales agency in New York known as DoubleClick This company was already selling some of the space on Stockhouse and so it was a relatively straightforward task to begin discussions with them about representing us.

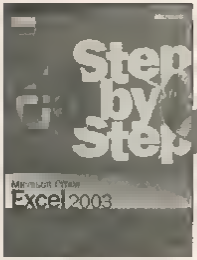
The big challenge, however, was that we didn't have a live Web site – and DoubleClick was leery about taking a chance on putting sales resources to selling an unknown product. I spent considerable time going through our plans for Investment com with various reps from DoubleClick and came up with a deal that I thought we could live with.

That, in many ways, was the easy part A much harder task was putting together a Web site that could like up to the hype that we were planning to unleash around it. To do that, I knew I was going to need a good editorial team – one that was young, enthusiastic and capable of producing bright, provocative copy to tight deadlines for a Web site that would change daily. And they would have to do it in the face of heavy, heavy competition from all corners

NEXT CHAPTER: Building the team ◗

Publisher's Pick

TOP TEN BOOK LIST



1

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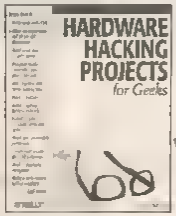

3

ISBN 0596003145
Title Hardware Hacking Projects for Geeks
Author Scott Fullam
Publisher O'Reilly & Associates

Rank	ISBN	Title	Author	Publisher
4	0596005253	Cascading Style Sheets The Definitive Guide 2nd Edition	Eric A Meyer	O'Reilly & Associates
5	0782141307	Mastering Windows Server 2003	Mark Minasi	Sybex
6	1587200953	CCNA Certification Library (CCNA Self-Study exam #640-801), Sixth Edition	Wendell Odom	Cisco Press
7	0764556010	Adobe Creative Suite All-in-One Desk Reference for Dummies	Jennifer Smith Jen deHaan	For Dummies
8	0764543997	Mac OS X Bible Panther Edition	Samuel A Litt	John Wiley & Sons
9	0321241584	Macromedia Studio MX 2004 Training from the Source	Shaowen Bardzell Jeffrey Bardzell	Macromedia Press
10	0735613753	Programming Microsoft Visual Basic NET	Francesco Balena Wintellect, Francesco Balena	Microsoft Press

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Title: Hardware Hacking Projects for Geeks
Authors: Scott Fullam
Publisher: O'Reilly
Price: $43.95
ISBN: 0-596-00314-5
Softcover 348 pages 2004
Reviewed by Keith Schengili-Roberts

The "Hacks" series has proven to be one of the most successful book series out of O'Reilly for the past few years. These titles trade off the original meaning of the word "hack" in the computer community, aimed at those who like to learn the innards of a device or piece of software in order to get the most out of it. The hacks series has covered off online services like eBay and Google to operating systems such as Windows XP and Mac OS X and other things like TiVo and wireless networking. But while all of those books have a very specific topic focus, its safe to say that this book – Hardware Hacking for Geeks – will appeal to those who really like to get down and dirty with their computer hardware. If the thought of taking a hacksaw to an obsolete Mac to make it into an aquarium or hooking your toaster up to the Internet brings a mischievous smile to your face, this is your book.

Hardware Hacking for Geeks details how to build 15 separate projects, and is divided into two main sections that cover off basic and advanced hacking tools and techniques. The basic projects include how to build a portable laptop power supply (using a lot of batteries), the famous "Macquarium" which turns an old first generation Macintosh computer into an aquarium, and how to get more distance out of your wireless connection using tin cans (I kid you not!) For those who have always wanted to dabble in overclocking their CPU there's a project on how to make your own water-based cooling system, how to hack into talking toys to your satisfaction, and for those who always wanted a James Bond car, there's even instructions on how to add a video periscope to your car. And these are all contained in the "easy" section! The more advanced part of the book looks at how to build your own digital video recorder, creating a building-sized display, building an Internet-connected toaster that can tell you the weather, how to build a wearable computer and more.

Probably one of the best things about this book is its detail – the author only assumes a certain eagerness of the reader to get more out of their gear, and does not require knowledge in electronics. Everything is tackled in a step-by-step fashion, so that even if you have never picked up a soldering gun or used a blow torch before, you will soon see how you can best put these tools safely to use in the projects you tackle.

The level of detail is what makes this book a winner – for example, the one aimed at turning an obsolete first-generation Macintosh into an ideal housing for an aquarium not only takes you through the process of properly cutting up and gutting the Mac cleanly and safely, but also looks at how you can build your own water-right aquarium out of Plexiglas to fit inside the old Mac. It then goes on to look at good filtration systems, and also looks briefly at other similar projects, such as putting an aquarium into an old PC monitor. All the while there are plenty of black-and-white photos to step you through each process. The best of these projects rely not only on some basic familiarity with hardware, but with some coding as well. Probably the best example of this is the "Furby Hack" where you not only have to do some radical surgery to your Furby (or other talking toy), but create and add-in your own daughter board which you can then program in C to say whatever you want it to say. The code examples in the book are sufficient to get you started, and are just enough to provide some direction on how you can do some tinkering of your own at the code level.

The harder projects probably shouldn't be tackled until you have some expertise with the tools covered in the first section, and generally require a greater investment in time and hardware. The weather forecasting toaster not only requires you do some significant re-wiring of your pop-up toaster (including how to build your own heating elements that say either "hot" or "cool"), but involves building a "Toast Control Unit" that connects to a PC hooked up to the Internet which then relays temperature information to the toaster. Considering that you are dealing with some considerable voltages here, this is not the sort of project to enter into lightly. For similar reasons, the video periscope for your car is also something not to be done on a whim without some thought as to how to minimize any accidental damage to your vehicle. Still, once you have the expertise with the tools, these projects are a great stepping-stone towards coming up with your own hardware hacks.

This is a book that will set apart the merely geeky from those true hackers willing to get down-and-dirty with their hardware. A terrific guide for people who want to have always hankered at modding and extending their existing hardware.

And personally, I can't wait for a sequel.

RATING

Information content: ****1/2
Readability: *****
Intended for: Beginner/Intermediate
Overall Rating: ****1/2
Contact: O'Reilly 1-800-998-9938

Book Review

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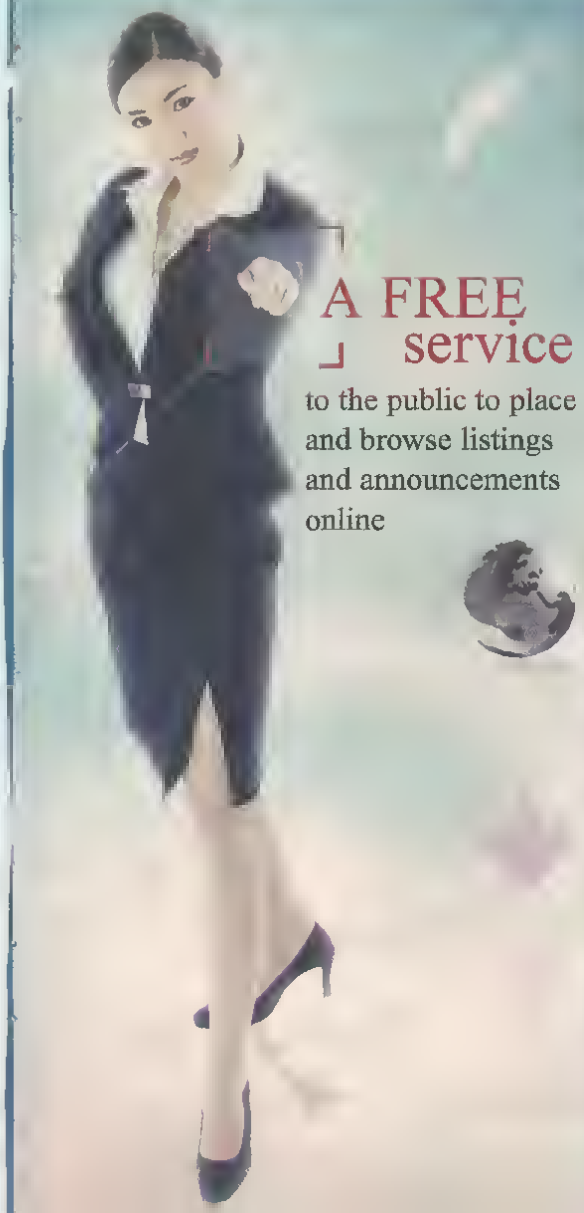

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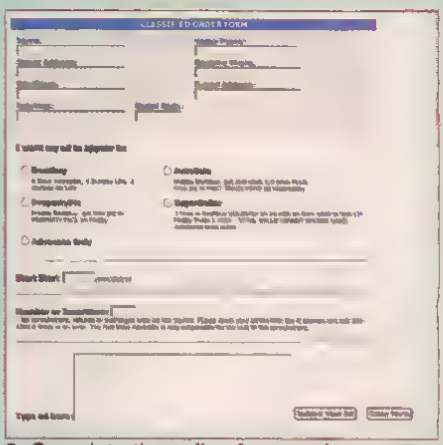

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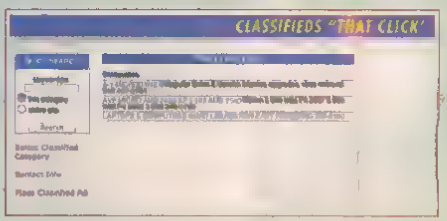

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